

Amendments to the claims:

This listing of claims will replace all prior versions, and listings, of claims in the application and reflects the amendment of claims 1, 23 and 26; the cancellation of claims 7 and 31; and the addition of claims 110-119.

Listing of claims:

1. (Currently Amended) A process for preparing an aqueous polysilicate microgel which comprises mixing (i) an aqueous solution of alkali metal silicate with (ii) an aqueous phase of silica-based material having a pH within the range of from 7 to 11, which is selected from the group consisting of silica-based sols, fumed silica, silica gels, precipitated silicas and acidified solutions of alkali metal silicates, and (iii) a metal salt other than an aluminum salt, wherein the metal salt is based on an alkali metal or alkaline earth metal and has an anion selected from the group consisting of borate, nitrate, chloride, formate and acetate, wherein the polysilicate microgel has a specific surface area of at least 1000 m²/g.
2. (Previously Presented) The process of claim 1, wherein the metal salt is based on an alkali metal or alkaline earth metal and it has an anion, and the anion is borate, nitrate or acetate.
3. (Original) The process of claim 1, wherein the metal salt is a borate.
4. (Original) The process of claim 1, wherein the polysilicate microgel obtained has a molar ratio SiO₂:M₂O, where M is alkali metal, between 3:1 and 20:1.
5. (Cancelled)
6. (Original) The process of claim 1, wherein the aqueous polysilicate microgel obtained has a SiO₂ content of at least 5% by weight.
7. – 22. (Cancelled)

23. (Currently Amended) Aqueous polysilicate microgel obtained by a process of mixing (i) an aqueous solution of alkali metal silicate with (ii) an aqueous phase of silica-based material having a pH within the range of from 6.5 to 11 which is selected from the group consisting of silica-based sols, fumed silica, silica gels, precipitated silicas and acidified solutions of alkali metal silicates, wherein the polysilicate microgel has a specific surface area of at least 1000 m²/g.

24. (Previously Presented) The aqueous polysilicate microgel of claim 23, wherein the process further comprises admixing an additional salt which is a metal salt other than an aluminium salt and based on alkali metal salt or alkaline earth metal.

25. (Original) The aqueous polysilicate microgel of claim 24, wherein the salt is a borate.

26. (Currently Amended) A process for preparing an aqueous polysilicate microgel which comprises mixing (i) an aqueous solution of alkali metal silicate with (ii) an aqueous phase of silica-based material having a pH within the range of from 7 to 11, which is selected from the group consisting of silica-based sols, fumed silica, silica gels, precipitated silicas and acidified solutions of alkali metal silicates, and (iii) a metal salt, wherein the aqueous polysilicate microgel obtained has a molar ratio of $\text{SiO}_2:\text{M}_2\text{O}$, where M is alkali metal, between 3:1 and 20:1, wherein the polysilicate microgel has a specific surface area of at least 1000 m²/g.

27. (Original) The process of claim 26, wherein the salt is a metal salt other than an aluminium salt and based on an alkali metal or alkaline earth metal.

28. (Original) The process of claim 27, wherein the salt is a borate.

29. (Cancelled)

30. (Previously Presented) The process of claim 26, wherein the aqueous polysilicate microgel obtained has a SiO₂ content of at least 15% by weight.

31. (Cancelled)

32. (Original) Aqueous polysilicate microgel obtained by the process of claim 26.

33. – 57. (Cancelled)

58. (Previously Presented) The process of claim 1, wherein the aqueous polysilicate microgel prepared by the process is anionic.

59. (Previously Presented) The process of claim 1, further comprising a step of diluting the aqueous polysilicate microgel by adding an aqueous solution or suspension.

60. – 65. (Cancelled)

66. (Previously Presented) The aqueous polysilicate microgel of claim 23, wherein the aqueous polysilicate microgel is anionic.

67. (Previously Presented) A drainage/dewatering aid comprising the polysilicate microgel of claim 23.

68. (Previously Presented) The aqueous polysilicate microgel of claim 23, further comprising an organic polymer.

69. (Cancelled)

70. (Previously Presented) The process of claim 26, wherein the aqueous polysilicate microgel prepared by the process is anionic.

71. (Previously Presented) The process of claim 26, further comprising a step of diluting the aqueous polysilicate microgel by adding an aqueous solution or suspension.

72. -97. (Cancelled)

98. (Previously Presented) The process of claim 1, wherein the aqueous solution of alkali metal silicate, component (i), has a pH of at least about 13.

99. - 100. (Cancelled)

101. (Previously Presented) The aqueous polysilicate microgel of claim 23, wherein the aqueous solution of alkali metal silicate, component (i), has a pH of at least about 13.

102. (Previously Presented) The process of claim 26, wherein the aqueous solution of alkali metal silicate, component (i), has a pH of at least about 13.

103. -106. (Cancelled)

107. (Previously Presented) The process of claim 1, wherein the aqueous phase of silica-based material, component (ii), has a pH of up to 10.6.

108. (Previously Presented) The aqueous polysilicate microgel of claim 23, wherein the aqueous phase of silica-based material, component (ii), has a pH of up to 10.6.

109. (Previously Presented) The process of claim 26, wherein the aqueous phase of silica-based material, component (ii), has a pH of up to 10.6.

110. (New) The process of claim 23, wherein the polysilicate microgel obtained has a molar ratio $\text{SiO}_2:\text{M}_2\text{O}$, where M is alkali metal, between 3:1 and 20:1.

111. (New) The process of claim 23, wherein the aqueous polysilicate microgel obtained has a SiO_2 content of at least 5% by weight.

112. (New) The process of claim 111, wherein the aqueous polysilicate microgel obtained has a SiO_2 content of at least 15% by weight.

113. (New) The process of claim 23, further comprising a step of diluting the aqueous polysilicate microgel by adding an aqueous solution or suspension.

114. (New) The process of claim 23, further comprising mixing components (i) and (ii) with (iii) an aluminium salt.

115. (New) The process of claim 114, wherein the aluminium salt, component (iii), is sodium aluminate.

116. (New) The process of claim 23, wherein the aqueous solution of alkali metal silicate, component (i), is an aqueous solution of sodium silicate.

117. (New) The process of claim 23, wherein the aqueous phase of silica-based material, component (ii), is an acidified solution of an alkali metal silicate.

118. (New) The process of claim 117, wherein the acidified solution of an alkali metal silicate, component (ii), is sodium silicate.

119. (New) The process of claim 117, wherein the acidified solution of an alkali metal silicate, component (ii), is an alkali metal silicate that has been both acidified and aluminate.